

# SCHOOL DISTRICT OF OKALOOSA COUNTY

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MEDIA RELEASE

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## USDA EXTENDS FREE MEALS FOR KIDS THROUGH DECEMBER 31<sup>st</sup>

The US Department of Agriculture has extended flexibility in school food service programs through the end of December. This means that all school-age children in Okaloosa County are eligible to receive free meals regardless of the school they attend or their family's income status. Meals will remain free through the last day of school this calendar year, which is December 18<sup>th</sup>. The program includes both breakfast and lunch. The USDA cited the need for children to continue to receive safe, healthy, and nutritious food as people return to work as a main reason behind the extended flexibility.

Superintendent Marcus Chambers provided additional clarification as it relates to Okaloosa County Schools. "This provision applies to all students, regardless of whether or not they qualify for free or reduced-price meals. I am pleased that our District can continue to provide support to families who may need it." According to Chambers, the free meals can be obtained by both brick and mortar and mySchool Online students. "mySchool Online students (or a parent) can come to the school at a specified time to pick up Grab-and-Go breakfast and lunch for multiple days." Families should contact their school beginning next Tuesday to learn how and when to pick up meals.

For students in the brick and mortar building, only breakfast and lunch meals are free. Students must pay for any ala carte items. Students will still be required to enter their lunch PIN when receiving a meal so that the district can track meal service for reporting purposes. Meal accounts won't be charged unless the student purchases something beyond the standard breakfast and lunch.

According to Chambers, it is still extremely important for families to apply for free or reduced-price meal benefits even though meals are free through December. "Parents may not see the point of applying now, but much of the funding that school districts receive for academic intervention is based on the percentage of our students who qualify for free or reduced-price meals. We rely on this funding to provide supplemental services to students in high need areas. Plus, the program may not be extended beyond December, so we're encouraging families to go ahead apply now so there is no risk of a break in benefits next spring."

View the USDA Press Release here:

<https://www.usda.gov/media/press-releases/2020/08/31/usda-extends-free-meals-kids-through-december-31-2020>

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